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ABSTRACT

Good teachers of reading should ask questions which link the research knowledge base in reading, effective teaching, and learning with proficient decision-making skills. These questions should focus on the content to be taught, the behaviors of the student, and the behaviors of the teacher. Content questions address central concepts, prior knowledge needs, strategies to be taught, difficult vocabulary, inferential questions to be asked, and ways to integrate other subjects in the curriculum. Questions concerned with learning behavior of the student are aimed at discovering in which mode the student learns most easily and how the student will show understanding of what has been learned, and of the skills which aid comprehension. Behavior of the teacher questions address how to determine the student's prior knowledge, building background knowledge, teaching comprehension strategies, incorporating principles of motivation and practice, managing instructional time, providing immediate and continuous assessment upon which to base future decisions, integrating subjects, reading orally to the students, and providing silent reading time. All these questions serve as the basis for a model lesson. By implementing the decisions reached after this questioning process, teachers will transfer control of the reading reasoning process from themselves to their students. This will promote the development of students as active, constructive, strategic, fluent, and motivated readers. (MG)

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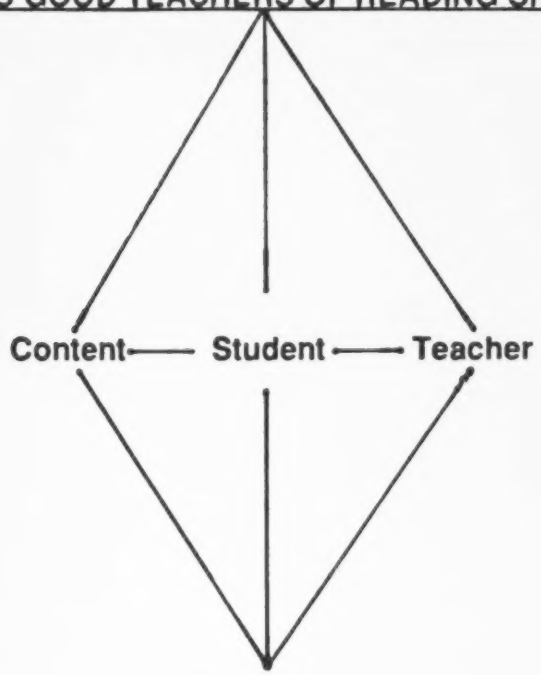
QUESTIONS GOOD TEACHERS OF READING SHOULD ASK



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ABSTRACT

Good teachers of reading ask questions which link the research knowledge base in reading, effective teaching, and learning with proficient decision-making skills. These questions focus on the content to be taught, the behaviors of the student and the behaviors of the teacher.

This paper addresses three interrelated components of the teaching process. It couples the knowledge base gained from recent research in reading with recent research in effective teaching and learning. It links this knowledge base with the decision-making skills required of teachers by specifying questions which the expert teacher of reading would ask. It applies the questions to a lesson designed to teach a reading comprehension strategy.

QUESTIONS GOOD TEACHERS OF READING SHOULD ASK

There seems to be little disagreement that historical research shows the level of literacy needed by the year 2000 will be much greater than what was considered a satisfactory level in 1950 (Resnick and Resnick, 1977). Therefore, it becomes imperative to empower teachers with the knowledge and decision-making skills needed to enable all students to achieve the level of literacy that will be needed today as well as in the twenty-first century.

Teachers are already empowered by their professional training to: explore alternatives, weigh their values in terms of potential instructional ends in the classroom, decide what teaching and learning behaviors are most appropriate and act on those decisions (Hoffman and Edwards, 1986). When these skills are coupled with the wealth of knowledge gained from recent research in reading, effective teaching and learning, the many qualitative and quantitative differences observed between the novice and the expert teacher can be diminished.

In this paper we intend to link the knowledge base with the decision-making skills by specifying questions which the expert teacher of reading would ask. These questions will then be applied to a lesson designed to teach a strategy for determining main ideas and supporting details.

The sorts of questions good teachers of reading ask about their role may be divided among three areas: content, student behaviors and teacher behaviors (Hunter, 1982). The decisions reached on these

questions will promote the development of the student as an active, constructive, strategic, fluent and motivated reader (Anderson, et al., 1985).

CONTENT

o **What content is to be taught today or this week?** Although it is important for the teacher of reading to be involved with decision-making regarding the on-going questions pertaining to the goals of education globally, we have chosen to focus on the questions involving the objectives currently in place within a school district.

o **What concepts are central to understanding the content?** To adequately prepare students to read any text requires that a teacher determine the important concepts so that background knowledge of the students can either be connected to the information in the text or developed where there is insufficent background knowledge. Suggestions in teacher's manuals for setting purposes for reading should be scrutinized to be sure that important ideas in the text are focused upon, rather than concepts that are not central to understanding the content.

o **What prior knowledge needs to have been acquired before a student can learn the material being presented?**

One of the principles of learning dictates that simpler concepts,

generalizations, and processes must be learned by the student, not just presented to the student, before more complicated generalizations can be mastered (Hunter, 1982).

o **What strategies need to be taught or reinforced to aid in comprehending this passage?** Research has shown that if a teacher does not specifically teach how to understand what is being read, the students will not automatically learn it. Students need to know what strategies expert readers use to monitor their own understanding of a passage and then what to do when they do not understand something they are reading. Both conceptual and contextual strategies need to be taught.

o **What words do I think the students are not likely to know in this passage, and how will I assist them in recognizing and understanding the words?** First, during the conceptual development of the lesson, one could show pictures or objects and draw out relevant information from their previous experiences which would aid them. All words should be presented in sentences, especially functional words such as *of, still, never, rather.* This helps the child to mentally fix the word in his mind. Besides using the context, one may point out or solicit other decoding skills that may be applied to the word such as phonic principles, affixes and roots, and compound words.

o **What questions, mostly inferential, could be asked which will help students see relationships between what they know and what they are reading?** This linkage is important because it enables the children to retrieve the information from their long-term memory more quickly when they have it "hooked" to currently stored memories. In addition, asking inferential questions stimulates higher level thinking than does asking literal questions, while the details will still be brought out as the students "prove" their responses to the inferential questions.

o **What content, present and past, from other subjects could be integrated with this topic and vice versa? What aspects of this topic could be integrated with other subjects currently being studied?** The research on transfer of training shows that transfer does not take place automatically, yet, "transfer can dramatically shorten or lengthen the time it takes to acquire new information" (Hunter, 1982, p. 107). In addition, integrating subjects facilitates literacy by providing meaningful material on which to practice comprehension and word recognition strategies that have been taught.

LEARNING BEHAVIOR OF THE STUDENT

o **Will the student "read, discuss, listen, observe, do?"** (Hunter, 1982, p. 5). Since there is no one best way to learn, more

learning usually results when several of these actions are used than when just one is used exclusively. Auditory and visual modes of learning are used the majority of the time in classrooms with little emphasis on kinesthetic and tactual modes. Yet, many students in remedial reading classes tend to be kinesthetic and tactual learners who need more of these types of activities in their heterogeneous homeroom.

o **How will the children show that they understand the concepts, possess the skills or utilize the strategies which aid comprehension?** These activities must be observable and certify individual learning. A teacher needs to know immediately whether reteaching or further practice with the concept is needed. (Hunter, 1982). Signaling, writing, choral responses, or making thinking public through sampled responses are several examples which give immediate feedback, while there are dozens of examples of postreading activities that give delayed feedback.

BEHAVIOR OF THE TEACHER

The behavior of teachers is placed last because it is the one component of instruction over which teachers have the greatest control. They can vary instruction to meet the needs of the content and the students.

o **How will I access the student's prior knowledge about the concepts which are central to understanding this content?** According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Williamson (1985), determining and activating prior knowledge in a reading lesson is the part most often shortened or even eliminated altogether. Yet, recent research shows it to be essential in helping students construct meaning.

o **If adequate background knowledge is lacking, how will I provide that information using several modes of learning?** Teachers should recognize their own preferred style of teaching (auditory, visual, tactual, or kinesthetic mode) and adapt their instructional technique to include all the children's modes of learning.

o **Which comprehension strategy will I teach with this lesson? Why is it important? What is the nature of this strategy, and when should the students use it? How will I present it, model it, and provide guided and independent practice with it?** It is important to present the strategy before rather than after the story is read so the students have meaningful material on which to practice the strategy immediately.

o **What principles of motivation will I use?** Hunter (1982) identified six factors that effect motivation: level of concern, feeling tone, success, interest, knowledge of results and intrinsic-extrinsic

motivation. Each of these factors may not be used in each lesson. Yet, the opportunity does exist to select from the various factors those which the teacher thinks will be most effective.

o **How will the psychological principles of practice be applied?** Initially, practice should be performed on short meaningful amounts for a short intense time period. New learnings should have massed practice--three to four short practices the first day--while old learnings should have distributed practice--practice spaced over several days, weeks, or months. Lastly, the students must be provided with knowledge of the results.

o **Am I managing the prime instructional time effectively so minimum time is wasted in routine duties such as sharpening pencils, putting away and taking out materials, moving to groups, and taking bathroom breaks?** Even these "breaks" can be maximized for learning if thought provoking questions or problems are posed to provide the set induction for the next learning activity that will be taking place. In addition, clear, concise directions should be given to minimize the time required for organizational activities. Consideration of the most effective instructional unit, be it whole group, small group, pairs, or one-on-one, also needs to be made.

o **How am I providing for immediate and continuous assessment using a variety of methods and instruments? Am I using a variety of contexts at the student's developmental level which focuses on a broad range of skills and knowledge within a meaningful setting?** These questions form part of a cyclical process that provide the base of information from which to make the next sequence of instructional decisions.

Three questions remain that are not part of individual lessons but which are important to the classroom reading program as a whole. Consideration of these questions also needs to be addressed by the teacher.

o **How am I integrating the various subjects of the curriculum?** By integrating subjects, one can provide the massed and distributed practice and linkage so necessary in aiding retention. Transfer of reading strategies is also enhanced when their use is practiced in content area texts.

o **Am I reading orally to the students every day from a variety of types of children's narrative and expository literature?** This activity whets the appetite, serves as a model of good oral reading and provides the students with exposure to literature which may not be available to them elsewhere.

o **Do I provide daily time for students to engage in sustained silent reading?** Research shows a direct relationship between improvement in reading achievement and the quantity of independent, silent reading students do in school. Yet, primary children spend an average of only seven to eight minutes a day reading silently in school, and middle grade students average only 15 minutes per school day (Anderson, et al., 1985).

MODEL LESSON DESIGN

The questions formulated above served as the basis for the decisions made in constructing the following model lesson. We are making the assumption that this is for an upper primary, lower intermediate grade level. Further assumptions are that the basal reading story has been divided into two sessions based upon the characteristics of the story and that this lesson is based upon the second part of the story.

Why am I teaching this strategy? Why do the students need to know this strategy? Strategies for determining main ideas and supporting details give us a way of remembering and organizing information.

First, create a concrete experience for the students which will activate their prior knowledge, arouse their curiousity, and integrate the experience in a manner that connects to their personal lives. In

this stage, you are attempting to motivate the students to want to learn what you are about to teach.

Say, "What if our principal came in and said that someone had called the school looking for a lost dog. What would we need to know to help him out?" Brainstorm to elicit details from the children that would describe the dog.

The next step is to help the students analyze the experience. Ask the students what they have just done. Explain that they have just brainstormed several "details" that they would need to know if they were to help someone find their missing dog.

What is the nature of this strategy that I am teaching? At this point the teacher looks for another way to look at the strategy that engages the senses of the learner, while still giving students the opportunity for more reflection.

Hold up a poster or milk carton that contains the picture and description of a missing child. Say, "What would we need to know to help find this missing child?" Brainstorm with the children again, and this time write down on the chalkboard or overhead projector details that are elicited from the children. Compare their responses to the details listed on the milk carton.

At this point instruction is given to the students in the form of explanation or modeling. In other words, now the teacher "teaches" the strategy. Explain that once again the students had provided what was necessary to know before one could find the lost child. Tell the

children that finding the lost child is the "main idea" of putting the picture on the poster or carton. What they needed to know about that missing child, or in the earlier example the missing dog, are called "details" about the "main idea".

How does this strategy work? Now the teacher lets the students try the strategy out themselves. At this point, they experiment, manipulate, and build on the instruction given in the previous step. This stage involves practice on the part of the students, guided or coached by the teacher.

Say, "In the part of the story we read yesterday about Braveheart the Seminole Indian boy, we found out that he had tricked the men of the tribe into letting him go on the buffalo hunt with them. Think about the ways he tricked them. Tell your partner the trick you remember." (Tape the head of the Indian boy wearing a headband on the chalkboard or flannel board while they are doing this.) Elicit from the students what Braveheart had done to trick the men into letting him go with them. As each idea is given, ask the children to signal whether this is an example or nonexample of how the men were tricked. Write correct responses on a feather and have a child place it in behind the headband until all details have been given. Elicit from the students that the main idea is found on the headband, supporting the details found on the feathers.

Now the students are ready for the worksheets or workbook pages to try out their skills on the prescribed materials that accompany most

basal reading series. For this objective, the paragraph should have explicitly stated main ideas to follow the model presented. Students should be asked to write the details found in the paragraph that tell about the main idea. If the worksheets do not conform to the modeling and checking for understanding done by the teacher in the previous step, they should be revised accordingly. One way to alter the worksheets might be to provide a ditto sheet of the Indian boy on which the main ideas of the first two episodes are written on the headbands. Students would write the details on the feathers. (See Figure 1) Students might provide the main ideas of the last two episodes as well as the supporting details. (See Figure 2) Answers can then be compared and shared with their partners.

When is this strategy to be used? Much instruction ends with the completion of the worksheets, yet we know that children need repeated practice with varied materials before they "own" the strategy. In this stage of the instructional sequence, children apply what they have learned in some personal, meaningful way and share what they have learned with each other.

Using a form of semantic mapping, the student can use copies of the Indian head and feathers to organize their own ideas in order to predict the next part of the story, based upon a subtitle such as "Lost!" (See Figure 2) Remind them to think about the details suggested about the lost dog and lost child to see the relationships between what they already know and what they might be reading. Students will write

their own "main idea" of who or what might be lost across the headband. This supports the details they think might happen, which are written on the feathers. This framework can then be used as a creative writing activity. Individualization of instruction will occur as the more developmentally able students can use the individual feathers to represent a topic sentence of a paragraph, creating an entire story. Others will use the framework for a fully developed paragraph, while still others will simply repeat the details verbatim in their paragraph along with their stated main idea from the headband. In each case, students are successfully practicing the strategy independently.

The last step in the instructional sequence occurs when students share what they have learned with each other. Not only has the independent practice served to teach and reinforce the strategy to themselves, but through sharing, they are reinforcing the strategy for their peers. This stage can be done as a whole class, in small groups, or with peer sharing.

Additionally, by presenting the strategy before the reading of the selection, students can further practice the strategy during the next sequence of instruction. The independent practice activity of the previous objective has also served to become part of activating their prior knowledge, integrating the experience in a manner that connected to their personal lives, and motivating the students to want to learn about the correctness of their own predictions.

CONCLUSIONS

Good teachers of reading ask questions which link the research knowledge base in reading, effective teaching and learning with proficient decision-making skills. These questions focus on the content to be taught, the behaviors of the student and the behaviors of the teacher.

o **Content questions** address central concepts, prior knowledge needs, strategies to be taught, difficult vocabulary, inferential questions to be asked and ways to integrate other subjects in the curriculum.

o **Behavior of the student questions** address how to input the information and show what has been learned by the student.

o **Behavior of the teacher questions** address accessing prior knowledge, building background knowledge, teaching comprehension strategies, incorporating principles of motivation and practice, managing instructional time, providing immediate and continuous assessment upon which to base future decisions, integrating subjects, reading orally to the students and providing silent reading time.

By implementing the decisions reached, teachers will transfer control of the reading reasoning process from themselves to their students. This will promote the development of students as active, constructive, strategic, fluent and motivated readers.

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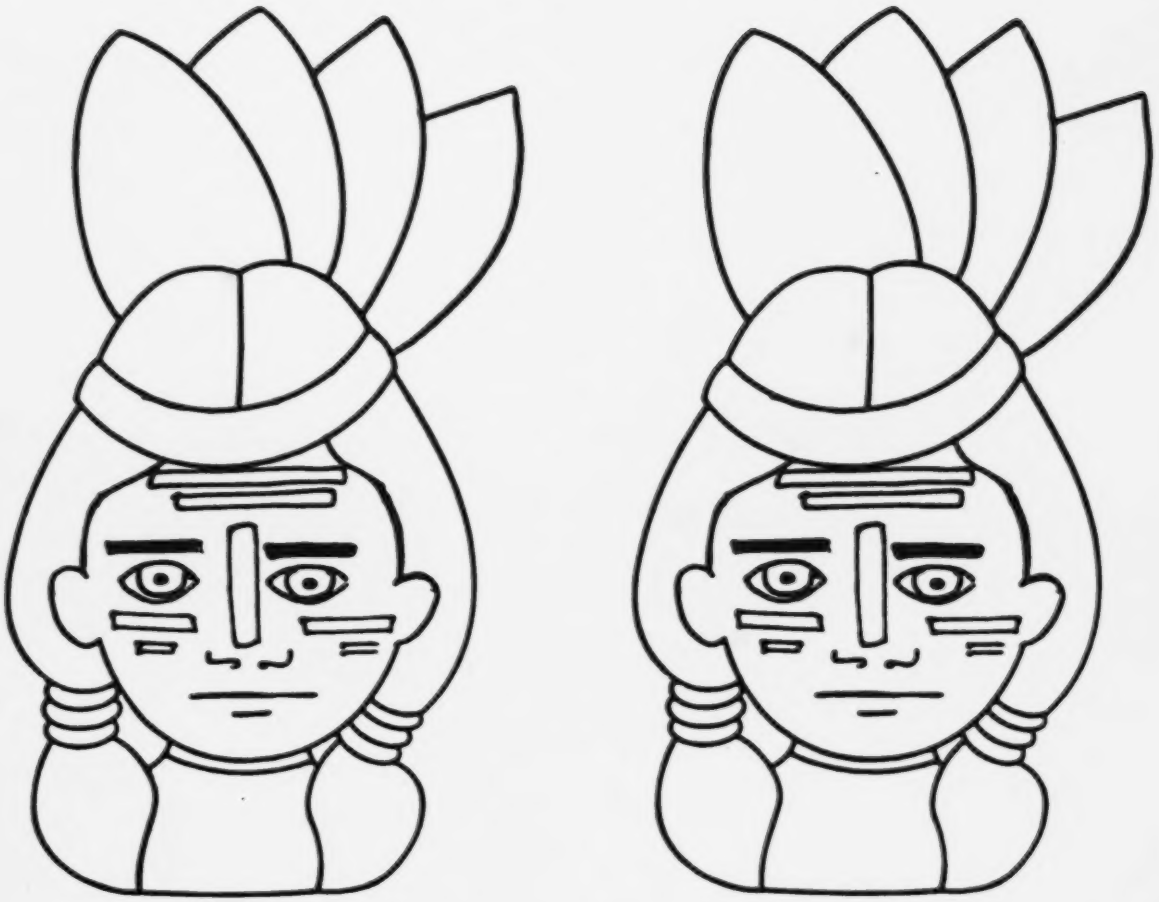
Figure 1

A knife is a good friend of an Indian Hunter. Brave Heart's father was a great hunter. He had made the knife that Brave Heart took into the woods. "See the knife marks on the trees beside the trail," said his father. "If you see these marks, you will know that one of our hunters made them. They will help you find your way, and you can make your own marks with your knife."

Indians follow the signs of the forest when they hunt. Brave Heart started out through the trees following a path that had been made by the feet of the hunters. He heard the sound of the bubbling of a brook. "This brook runs into our lake," Brave Heart remembered hearing his father say. "It can help you find your way if you are lost."

Figure 2



Addenda

CONTENT QUESTIONS:

- **What content is to be taught today or this week?**
- **What concepts are central to understanding the content?**
- **What prior knowledge needs to have been acquired before a student can learn the material being presented?**
- **What strategies need to be taught or reinforced to aid in comprehending this passage?**
- **How will I assist them in recognizing and understanding the words?**
- **What questions, mostly inferential, could be asked which will help students see relationships between what they know and what they are reading?**
- **What content, present and past, from other subjects could be integrated with this topic and vice versa?**
- **What aspects of this topic could be integrated with other subjects currently being studied?**

LEARNING BEHAVIOR OF THE STUDENT QUESTIONS:

- **Will the student "read, discuss, listen, observe, do?"**
- **How will the children show that they understand the concepts, possess the skills or utilize the strategies which aid comprehension?**

BEHAVIOR OF THE TEACHER QUESTIONS:

- **How will I access the student's prior knowledge about the concepts which are central to understanding this content?**
- **If adequate background knowledge is lacking, how will I provide that information using several modes of learning?**

o Which comprehension strategy will I teach with this lesson? Why is it important? What is the nature of this strategy, and when should the students use it? How will I present it, model it, and provide guided and independent practice with it?

o What principles of motivation will I use?

o How will the psychological principles of practice be applied?

o Am I managing the prime instructional time effectively so minimum time is wasted in routine duties such as sharpening pencils, putting away and taking out materials, moving to groups, and taking bathroom breaks?

o How am I providing for immediate and continuous assessment using a variety of methods and instruments? Am I using a variety of contexts at the student's developmental level which focuses on a broad range of skills and knowledge within a meaningful setting?

o How am I integrating the various subjects of the curriculum?

o Am I reading orally to the students every day from a variety of types of children's narrative and expository literature?

o Do I provide daily time for students to engage in sustained silent reading?

MODEL LESSON DESIGN

- Why am I teaching this strategy? Why do the students need to know this strategy?
- What is the nature of this strategy that I am teaching?
- How does this strategy work?
- When is this strategy to be used?

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Anderson, Richard C., Elfrieda H. Hiebert, Judith A. Scott, and Ian A. G. Wilkinson. Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report on the Commission on Reading. Washington, DC: The National Institute of Education, 1985.

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